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AUTHOR Burns, J. L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated changes in organization and crystallization of self-concept that may occur during early school years. Three models from self-concept literature that address early childhood development of self-concept are briefly described. Hypotheses are predicted on the assumptions that: (1) changes should manifest themselves between kindergarten and second grade, and (2) crystallization of self-concept would be marked by changes in variance of self-concept measures over this time period. The Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale and the Martinek-Zaichkowski Self-Concept Scale for Children were administered to 91 kindergartners and 79 second graders. Tests of differences in variance based on the "F" distribution were computed. Of the nine hypothesized subscale or factor differences in variance, six were supported. Also, two other absolute differences in variance were in the hypothesized direction. Results show that variance in measures of self-concept does seem to reflect developmental influences. Attributes of self-concept that were predicted to be more crystallized or consolidated by kindergarten time frequently showed smaller variance among kindergartners than among second graders. (Author/TJH)

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Some Evidence on Development of Self-Concept in Young School-Age Children

J. L. Burns, B. M. Boals, & S. D. Pruett, Arkansas State University

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Abstract

This study investigated changes in organization and crystallization of self-concept which may occur during early school years. Three models from self-concept literature which address early childhood development of self-concept were described briefly. Hypotheses were predicated on the assumptions that (1) changes should manifest themselves between kindergarten and second grade and (2) that crystallization of self-concept would be marked by changes in variance of self-concept measures over this time period. The behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale and the Martinek-Zaichkowski Self-Concept Scale for Chidren were administered to 91 kindergarten students and 79 second grade students. Tests of differences in variance based on the F distribution were computed. Of the nine hypothesized subscale or factor differences in variance six were supported. Also, two other absolute differences in variance were in the hypothesized direction.

Some Evidence on Development of Self-Concept in Young School-Age Children

A generation ago Wylie (1961) observed a paucity of data upon which to base a description of the development of the self-concept. Recently, Krantz and Burton (1986) noted that contemporary research has stressed correlations, modification, and comparative study of self-concept.

Over a similar period of time, the speculation or assumption has held that "crystallization" or a relative stabilizing of self-concept occurs sometime during the early elementary school age years. Engel (1959), as cited by Wylie (1961) found that crystallization was achieved earlier in development than eighth grade (which was the youngest age group studied). Feshbach and Weiner (1982) concluded that at least some aspects of self-concept, as self-evaluation of one's stable ability following failure, have not yet crystallized by age six. Hence, one may reason that the crystallization of self-concept occurs between first and eighth grades. The available models suggest that the formative years would be earlier rather than later during that time span.

The models for describing self-concept development are exemplified by the following: self-concept as evolving through play, self-concept as related to development of self-understanding,

and an ordering of events which in turn relate to aspects of self-concept.

Wenar (1971) stated that dramatic play has appeal, even for preschool children and that games take on significance in middle childhood. They child's world is play and the adult's is work. From play the youngster would develop a perspective of self as a participant in play. The pre-school child could have a self-concept with respect to play that would be clearly defined. In later childhood, with experience in games containing rules and games of a cooperative or competitive nature, this aspect of self-concept could undergo change.

Damon (1983) reviewed some literature on self-concept development as a function of self-understanding. He indicated that measures of self-concept in children have been insensitive to changes in the cognitive quality of children's developing self-understanding and that existing instruments do not "correct for" developmental transformations in the conception of self. He cited Broughton (1978) and Selmon (1980) in proposing an order of events in self-concept development. The suggested order of events is: (1) physicalistic conception of self (before age six); (2) distingishing psychological experience from the physical, but inconsistently (at about age 6); and (3) the psychological

differentiated from the physical (at about age eight). This model would provide a basis for making some predictions about the young child's change in perception of relationships with peers.

Monte (1987) addressed an ordering of events in self-concept development. At age four to six years, the child consolidates and refines perception of the bodily self, self-identity, and begins consideration of self-esteem or pride which has emerged. Relations with the family members and comparison and contrasts are also underway. Family members as well as possessions may be viewed as extensions of the self (e.g., "This ball is mine," "He is my daddy."). Next, and after age six, is the development of self beyond the family as in relationships with peers and with adults beyond the family. According to Feshbach and Weiner (1982) the crystallization of one's stable ability occurs after age six. This model of ordering could provide a basis for predicting early childhood self-concept consolidation with respect to the physical self, the home and family, relationships with peers, as well as perception with respect to success and failure.

Based on these models as well as the authors' own observations and experience in self-concept study, we expected that some crystallization or consolidation of self-concept should occur during the first two or three years children were in school. The

changes may not be reflected so much in averages or absolute levels of self-concept as in the variance (or randomness) of response. Aspects of self-concept which emerge earliest in development should be marked by lower variance at age five; as these aspects of self-concept are integrated into the broader self-concept, the variance of responses may increase at age seven. The earlier developing aspects of self-concept should later (past age seven) show another decrease in variance, but that test is beyond the scope of this study. The aspects of self-concept which emerge later in development should be marked by decreasing variance from ages five to seven. The consolidation effect would be most evident in these instances. Hence, the assumptions for this study were: (1) changes in self-concept should occur between kindergarten and second grade; (2) early emerging aspects of self-concept should show increasing variance as consolidation occurs; and (3) later emerging aspects of self-concept should show decreasing variance as consolidation occurs.

The hypotheses to be tested were formulated in terms of the definitions and descriptions of self-concept measures which were to be used in the study. Hypotheses will be stated in research form rather than in null form.

The Damon (1983) material indicated that the earliest developing aspect of self-concept was the physicalistic. This may be reflected by youngsters' self-descriptions and their estimates of their own attractiveness to others.. Hypothesis I is that measures of social attraction will show a slight increase or stay the same in variance from kindergarten to second grade.

The Monte (1987) material suggested early salience of the family in children's lives. Hence, self-concept with respect to home and family relationships and circumstances should consolidate early and be associated with early lower variance. Hypothesis II is that for this measure, variance among kindergarten children will be less than among second grade children.

In considering the self beyond the family, the material from Krantz and Burton (1986) and Monte (1987) provided a basis for predicting that peer status and in-school behavior should crystallize after age six. Hypothesis III is that measures of behavioral, personal, and social characteristics in school and measures of how well the youngster "fits into" the classroom environment should be characterized by a decrease in variance from kindergarten to second grade.

Wenar's (1971) material addressed the child's world of play. Early, spontaneous play should be characterized by early

consolidation of self-concept with respect to initiative, participation, etc. As the child continues in school and encounters the ideas of rule, cooperation, etc. the self-concept should undergo a reorganization. Hence, Hypothesis IV is that measures of social initiative will show an increase in variance from kindergarten to second grade.

Self-perception of status with respect to others has been considered delayed until third grade (Krantz & Burton, 1986). A measure which taps comparison with others should show a decrease in variance during the time period of this study. Hypothesis V, addressing a measure of satisfaction and happiness (with respect to others) is that such a measure would show a decrease in variance from kindergarten to second grade. Similarly, and involving a comparison of self with others, Monte (1987) proposed that comparison beyond the family occurred after age six. Traits which involve comparison, no only with peers but other in society, evolve into one's personality. Hypothesis VI is that personality traits and emotional tendency measures will show a decrease in variance from kindergarten to second grade.

A significant aspect of the life of the early school-age child is his or her evaluation of success or failure in school related tasks. Feshbach and Weiner (1982) found that

self-evaluation of one's stable ability is not crystallized at age six. Hypothesis VII is that measures of self-concept with respect to success or failure will show a decrease in variance from kindergarten to second grade.

The data in Table 1 show the measures and the nature of prediction of variance change which we expected to occur from kindergarten to second grade.

Insert Table 1 about here

Method

Subjects: Subjects were 91 kindergarten students and 79 second grade students from whom parental permission had been obtained for the students' participation. The students were drawn from the kindergarten and second grade populations in one of four small-town public elementary schools and from the respective grades in a private parochial school (Roman Catholic) in the same town.

Self-Concept Measures: Two self-concept measures were obtained for each participant. The students' teachers completed the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scales (BASE) (Coopersmith & Gilbert, 1982). The BASE yields a total self-esteem score along with five subscales: Student Initiative (SI), Social Attention (SN), Success/Failure

(SF), Social Attraction (SR), and Self-Confidence (SC). The students themselves also completed a self-concept measure, the Martinek-Zaichkowsky Self-Concept Scale (MZSCS) (Martinek & Zaichkowsky, 1977). This scale was designed primarily to measure the global self-concept of young children. The scale is non-verbal requiring little or no reading ability. The MZSCS also may be scored for factor, or subscale, scores: Satisfaction and Happiness (MZSH); Home and Family Relationships and Circumstances (MZHFR); Ability in Games, Recreation, and Sports ((MZGRS); Behavioral, Personal, and Social Charactertistic in School (MZBRS); and Personality Traits and Emotional Tendencies (MZPTET).

Data Analysis: For each self-concept scale and the accompanying subscale or factor the variance was computed. Preliminary analyses yielded no gender differences, based on the appropriate T-test, hence the data were collapsed over gender. Since the hypotheses dealt with predictions of differences in variance, the key analyses were directional, one-tail tests of such differences based on the F distribution (Edwards, 1964).

Results

The data in Table 2 show the results by hypothesis and accompanying self-concept measure. Six of nine hypothesized directional differences were supported. In addition, the measure

of social attraction (BASE-SR) did not show a significant change in variance. The expectation was that difference in variance would be small; however the change found was opposite to that expected.

Insert Table 2 about here

Conclusions

Variance in measures of self-concept does seem to reflect developmental influences. The attributes of self-concept which were predicted to be more crystallized or consolidated by kindergarten time frequently showed smaller variance among kindergarten students than among second grade students.

Consistent with predictions, early stability of self-concept was found with respect to home and family relationships. Moreover, the physicalistic self-concept by way of self-description of attractiveness to others yielded data approximating prediction even though the measure of physical self-concept was minimal.

Later stability of self-concept as indicated by later smaller variance was shown with some consistency for the predicted variables. These were the perception of peer status and in-school behavior and how well the youngster "fits into" the classroom,

self-perception of comparison with others in society beyond the peer group, and self-concept with respect to success and failure. The clearest instances of decrease in variance from kindergarten to second grade were those of how the student "fits into" the classroom and self-perception with respect to success or failure..

Clearly self-concept develops as a function of interaction of the individual with significant events in his or her experience. The results of this kind of study should help clarify the nature of events to which children would be more responsive at what times in development. One must ask, not only, "What influences self-concept?" but "What influences self-concept at what time(s) in the early school years?".

The second assumption upon which this study was based, that early emerging aspects of self-concept should show increasing variance as consolidation occurs (during the time period involved in this study) should be tested further. In addition, the expected decrease in variance with later (past age seven/grade two) self-concept development is open to test. The models of self-concept cited earlier show some consistency in suggesting that the self-concept would show considerable crystallization before adolescence. Classical psychoanalytic theory would predict earlier consolidation. The time of the early school-age years are

likely marked by continuing reorganization, culminating with an organized sense of self.

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Table 1

Predicted Variance Change

Measures	Variance Change from Kindergarten to Second Grade		
	± Same	Increase	Decrease
Social Attraction	x	x	
Home & Family Relationships		x	
Behavioral, Personal, & Social Characteristics in School			x
Social Attention			x
Social Initiative		x	
Satisfaction & Happiness			x
Personality Traits & Emotional Tendencies			x
Success/Failure			x

Table 2

Tests of Variance Between Grades

Hypothesis and Scale		Variance Kindergarten	Variance Grade 2	F
I.	BASE-SR	5.81	5.01	1.16[a]
II.	MZ-HFR	1.14	1.77	1.55*
III.	MZ-BPS	.72	.46	1.57*
	BASE-SN	6.00	2.82	2.13**
IV.	BASE-SI	19.80	23.04	1.16
V.	MZ-SH	.92	.61	1.58*
VI.	MZ-PTET	1.23	1.19	1.04
	MZ-BPS	.72	.46	1.57*
VII.	BASE-SF	3.61	1.12	3.21**

[a]Direction of this is opposite to prediction

*$p<.05$ **$p<.01$